

was selected as victim, whose fall would prove that rank, wealth, honour, long public service, and even the King's personal friendship, would no longer suffice to protect the heretic from the flames. Sir John Oldcastle was a knight of good family and estate in West Herefordshire, that outlying district of England where Swynderby and Brute had so successfully established a Lollard party in the teeth of Bishop Trevenant. In the early years of Henry the Fourth's reign, Sir John had earned the gratitude of the new dynasty by his activity in maintaining order as Koyal Commissioner on the disturbed and rebellious Welsh Border. In 1409 he married his third wife, Joan, heiress of Lord Cobham of Kent, and thereby came into possession of estates and castles round Cooling and Hoo, on the shores of the Thames and Medway. In this district, exposed to the eye of the world far more than in his ancestral home among the western mountains, he nevertheless offered the same open protection to Lollardry, and made his new domain another nest of heretics. He was himself a man of genuine religious conviction and piety, and by no means a mere priest-hater. Satirists expressed their dislike of his sanctimonious habits :—

It is unkindly for a knight,
That should a kinge's
castle keep, To babble the
Bible day and night
In resting time when he
should sleep ; And carefully
away to creep
Fro' all the chief of
chivalry. Well ought him to
wail and weep,
That such lust hath of Lollard ry.

As soon as Henry the Fifth had ascended the throne, the Bishops were given leave and encouragement to attack him, although the King first tried whether personal exhortation and argument could not move his old friend to repentance. But Henry was no more successful with the knight than he had been with the tailor, and the interview only added bitterness to estrangement. The Bishops' turn had come, and the heretic was cited to appear in the spiritual court. On receiving this summons Oldcastle adopted the theoretical position, that the Church had no jurisdiction over him, a plea clearly illegal